

St. James' Episcopal Church
833 West Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-255

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. WIS-255

ST. JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Location: 833 West Wisconsin Avenue (south side of West Wisconsin Avenue at the intersection of North Ninth Street), Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Present Owner and Occupant: St. James' Episcopal Church

Statement of Significance: St. James', considered one of Wisconsin's finest Gothic Revival buildings, is reported to be the city's first stone church, and is now the denomination's oldest surviving church edifice in Milwaukee.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1867-68. Ground was broken on May 27, 1867, and on July 25 the cornerstone was laid. St. James' opened on July 25, 1868. Cost of the church and its furnishings exceeded \$50,000.
2. Architect: Gordon William Lloyd of Detroit
3. Original and subsequent owners: The structure was built for and has remained the property of St. James' Episcopal Church.
4. Builders and suppliers: Robert McKelvey, a stone cutter by trade, was the superintendent; Alvan Read was the carpenter.
5. Original plans: Lloyd's drawings survived the fire of 1872 but by 1920 were lost.
6. Alterations and additions:
 - a. 1870-71: In 1870 the tower and spire were finished, and during the next year a carillon of nine bells, manufactured by Jones and Co. of Troy, N. Y., and a new organ, built by Marshall Bros. of Milwaukee, were installed, and a fence was put up in front of the church.

- b. 1872-74: A fire of undetermined origin swept through St. James' on December 31, 1872, destroying everything but the stone walls, tower, spire, and bells, windows in the north wall, and, possibly, the clere-story windows. By mid-January, 1873, funds were being raised to rebuild the church, and this task, commenced in April 1873, was completed in all but a few details by April 19, 1874, when St. James' reopened. Interestingly, the edifice was reconstructed according to Gordon Lloyd's original plans and as rebuilt, included the chancel, intended from the outset but not erected in the 1860s for economic reasons. Detailed descriptions of the new St. James' appeared in the Milwaukee Sentinel for June 20, 1873 and April 18, 1874, and in the Evening Wisconsin for April 1, 1874 (reprinted in the History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Chicago, 1881, 863-864). The articles also inform us that the construction work was done by day laborers supervised by Robert McKelvey, who had been employed on the original fabric, and Henry Weissenborn was the carpentry and woodwork foreman. Expenditures for the project totalled \$40,000.
- c. 1891-95: In 1891 the church acquired a new organ, built by the Lancashire Marshall Co. of Moline, Ill. In the years immediately following consecration of the edifice (1892), electric lights were installed and the interior was redecorated.
- d. 1899: The \$20,000 limestone and brick parish house was added at the rear (south end) of St. James'. Architect John A. Moller of Milwaukee drew the plans (now lost); the mason and carpenter were J. P. Jones and George B. Posson, respectively.
- e. 1913-14: In 1913 the narthex was refurbished, a new tile floor laid therein, and the location of the stairway in the east tower vestibule changed. During the following year the auditorium and chancel were remodelled under the direction of William H. Schuchardt, Milwaukee architect. This project involved elevating the altar and related structural changes in the chancel, installation of new flooring in chancel, nave, and aisles, enclosing the iron columns of the nave arcade and otherwise simplifying the interior, refinishing the woodwork, and repainting the walls and ceilings. A new altar, reredos, communion rail, and credence table were put in place. New light fixtures, designed at this time were installed somewhat later.

- f. 1925: The Chapel of Beautiful Memories, planned by St. James' Rector Arthur Lord, was created in the parish house, and a small wing, probably to accommodate a new entrance, was added to the parish house.
- g. 1929: A new organ, built by Henry Pilcher's Sons, Inc. of Louisville, Ky., was installed.
- h. 1931: Wooden kneelers were installed.
- i. 1940: Both church and parish house were renovated.
- j. 1945: The Nativity Chapel, planned and executed by the Ossit Church Furniture Co., Janesville, Wisconsin, was created in the south end of the west aisle. Most of the exquisite woodwork, carvings, and panelling dates from the sixteenth century and originally ornamented a private chapel near Brussels, Belgium. It later belonged to Clarence Falk of Milwaukee and was donated to St. James' by the former Mrs. Lloyd R. Smith.
- k. 1950-51: At the time of the parish centennial St. James' was redecorated, and the kitchen, dining room, and an anteroom in the lower level of the parish house were remodelled. For the latter project, carried out in 1951, the architect was Perce Schley and the contractor was the Peters Construction Co. Somewhat later, the exterior of the church and the organ were renovated.
- l. 1957: The baptistery at the south end of the east aisle was redecorated under the direction of the Ossit Church Furniture Co. The woodwork is late Gothic and came from the same building as that in the Nativity Chapel. The baptistery font dates from reconstruction of the church after the fire of 1872 (It was donated by the workmen who rebuilt St. James'.), but the cover was added in the present project.
- m. 1874-1958: During this long period the memorial windows in the aisles have been created and set in place, and they present an interesting variety of styles and techniques.
- n. 1962-63: The parish house was extensively altered on the lower and main levels in 1962. Harry A. Ollrogge of Milwaukee was the architect for the \$110,000 project, A. Drescher and Co. the contractor. A copy of

Ollrogge's specifications and prints of his drawings are in church files. His plans included proposed changes in the second story, to be carried out at a later date. Then, in April 1963, fire struck the parish house, causing some \$30,000 damage--most of it to the second floor and attic. These areas were subsequently rebuilt according to Ollrogge's plans.

- o. 1966: New glass doors were installed in the main entrance (north elevation) and central portal in the vestibule.
- p. Unspecified dates: The patterned slate roof on the spire, shown in early photographs, was replaced. City heat was installed.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

St. James' Church was erected for Milwaukee's fourth Episcopal parish, founded in 1850. Their first church, at Spring Street (Wisconsin Avenue) and Second Street, was a frame structure, Greek Revival in style, and originally built for the Unitarian Society. In the early 1850s they moved it to the site of the present building, a site that then contained an old cemetery. Most of the graves and markers were transferred to Forest Home Cemetery in the 1850s, but a few may still be seen in the church basement. For many years after construction of the new church, the old one remained nearby, continuing to serve the parish until it was finally demolished in the mid-1920s.

Among the church members who played important roles in the erection of the church in the 1860s was the prominent Milwaukee businessman Alexander Mitchell, who served on the building committee and is reported to have donated funds amounting to almost one-third of the fabric's cost. Despite the generosity of Mitchell and other contributors, debts incurred in the building and reconstructing St. James' were not paid in full until the early 1890s. Only then could the church be consecrated, and this took place on June 3, 1892.

C. Sources of Information:

- 1. Important old views: A drawing of the exterior, seen from the northeast, was published in Charles B. Harger (compiler), Milwaukee Illustrated, Milwaukee, 1877, 21. There are a few nineteenth century photographs of the exterior in the collections of the Milwaukee County Historical Society ("Old Settlers' Scrapbook," Figs. 208 and 218) and the Local History Room of the Milwaukee

Public Library. A photo of the exterior taken before addition of the parish house appeared in Illustrated News Annual: Milwaukee 1892-93, 57, and a view dating from 1900-03 was reproduced on the cover of St. James' Sixtieth Anniversary Celebration; Souvenir Programme of 1910. The publication issued by the parish on the occasion of its seventy-fifth anniversary in 1925 gives an excellent view of the nave, aisles, and chancel before the remodelling of 1914, as well as photographs taken soon after completion of this project.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

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"Man, 25, Is Charged in Parish House Fire," Milwaukee Journal, April 9, 1963, 1, 3.

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"A New Church," Milwaukee Sentinel, March 9, 1867, 1.

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"St. James' Church," Milwaukee Sentinel, April 24, 1867, 1; July 26, 1867, 1; and July 20, 1873, 8.

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"The St. James Mystery," Milwaukee Sentinel, January 24, 1873, 4.

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Prepared by Mary Ellen Wietczykowski
1111 North Astor Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
August 3, 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: St. James is a well-proportioned Gothic Revival building, believed to be the first stone church in the city of Milwaukee. The interior of the church was gutted by fire in 1872 but rebuilt according

to the architect's original plans. A square tower with a broach spire occupies the northeast corner of the building while a low stone spire defines the northwest corner. Alterations and changes in the nave have been made since the building was reconstructed.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is "T" shaped with no transepts. A parish house built in 1899 occupies the east wing of the "T", and an entrance to a chapel forms the west wing. The main church is 124 feet x 53 feet. The parish house addition built in 1899 is 70 feet x 100 feet.
2. Foundation: Wauwatosa limestone
3. Wall construction: The walls and attached buttresses are of Wauwatosa limestone trimmed with dressed stone from Bridgeport quarries.
4. Framing: Masonry-bearing wall construction. Attached buttresses divide the side aisles into six bays. A clerestory is formed between the roof planes of the side aisles and the nave.
5. Porches, stoops: None
6. Chimneys: None
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is on the north facade. The original doors have been replaced by two modern glass doors set in Gothic arch. Two other entrances lead into the vestibule. One is located at a 45° angle on the northwest corner of the building and the other on the east side of the square tower. These entries have two panelled oak doors with wood transoms. Similar doors lead into the additions, the parish house and chapel entrance, each set in a Gothic arch.
 - b. Windows: The front (north) facade has two tall, paired stained glass windows set in stone tracery. Above these is a wheel window; the tower has an octafoil wheel window on the north.

The aisle walls have two stained-glass lancet windows per bay. Of particular note are the two Tiffany windows in the fourth bay of the east aisle. The first bay of the east aisle has leaded stained glass of a non-representational pattern -- this may be an original window, possibly from before the fire of 1872. Round-headed small clerestory windows pierce the nave walls. The windows in the parish house are clear glass units. Those in the added chapel are modern stained-glass units. The chancel, added after the fire, has stained-glass windows in its apsidal end.

c. Shutters: None

8. Roof:

- a. Shape: It is a gable roof with a shed roof over the side aisles. The tower has a broach spire. A small steep pent roof covers the northwest entry to the vestibule.
- b. Covering: Black slate, except for standing-seam roofs over the shed-roof side aisles.
- c. Cornice: The slight projections of the roof planes have boxed-in-eaves.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The basement of the main church is actually a cemetery, one of Milwaukee's oldest. Burial mounds and some tombstones may be seen there today. The kitchen, dining room, and Sunday School rooms are located in the basement of the parish house and chapel additions.

The vestibule of the church was extensively remodelled in 1913. The staircase above the vestibule to the choir loft was changed at this time. From the vestibule three entrances lead into the church, one for each of the two side aisles and one for the nave. The original church had no chancel due to lack of funds; the south end of the building was squared-off. After the 1872 fire the chancel with its apsidal end was added.

To the east, west, and south of the chancel are the added chapel and parish house with its offices, storerooms, and parlor. The parish house has a second story containing a small auditorium and meeting rooms.

Of special note are the Nativity chapel at the south end of the nave's west aisle, built in 1945, and the baptistery, built in 1957, located in a similar position at the east end of the east aisle. The wood (oak) is from a sixteenth century private chapel outside Brussels, Belgium. The font is of stone donated by the masons who worked on the building.

The aisles are separated from the nave by large pointed arches resting upon double cast-iron columns having a common stone base. The columns have since been encased in rectangular plastered "boxes."

2. Flooring: Terrazzo and carpeting are in the main church; carpets and vinyl covering elsewhere. The basement of the church has a dirt floor accented by gravestones.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, painted. The paneling of the baptistery and Nativity Chapel is oak.
4. Doorways and doors: The aisle doors consist of two panelled oak doors, each having two leaded-glass lights. The nave doorway has two modern glass doors.
5. Trim: Ornately moulded oak
6. Lighting: Electricity replaced the gas fixtures in the 1890s.
7. Heating: City heat. The church has tapped on to the line provided to heat the high-rise Y.M.C.A. building located west of the church.

D. Site:

The site fronts on Wisconsin Avenue, the major east-west street of Milwaukee. An apartment house is built up to the property line east of the church, crowding the building considerably. West of the church is the Y.M.C.A. A stone wall fences in the small front lawn area. The land drops off sharply to the south (rear) of the church. The side yards are narrow.

Prepared by John N. DeHaas, Jr.
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
July 25, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1969 Milwaukee Project which was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission of the City of Milwaukee, Richard W. E. Perrin, Chairman. The project was done under the direction of James C. Massey, then Chief of HABS, and the team members included architect John N. DeHaas, Jr. (Montana State University), Project Supervisor, Mary Ellen Wietczykowski---now Mary Ellen Young---(Milwaukee Landmarks Commission), Project Historian, and student architects Larry Hermsen (Iowa State University), Roger Little (Kansas University), Thomas Sanford (Washington State University), and Donna Woodrum (Virginia Polytechnic Institute). The data was prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS editors Carolyn R. Heath, Mary Farrell, Candace Reed and Philip Hamp. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack Boucher.